AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (canceled)

2. (currently amended) An apparatus, for accessing sets of information stored in an information system and accessible by means of a communications network, the apparatus comprising:

an input for receiving a set of information selected by a first user;

data storage for storing one or more user profiles, each said user profile comprising at least one predetermined keyword;

a meta-data generator arranged to automatically generate at least one set of meta-information from the set of information received at the input, said meta-information including at least a pointer for the set of information and at least one set of generated meta-information being stored in accessible data storage;

a comparator for comparing at least one of said one or more user profiles with said at least one set of meta-information and for identifying, in dependence upon the results of said comparison, a user having a profile similar to said at least one set of meta-information; and

a processor arranged to alert said first user to the identity of said user identified by said comparator;

~~An apparatus according to Claim 1,~~ wherein the apparatus is arranged for use by a plurality of users, each of said plurality of users having at least one associated user profile stored in ~~said~~ data storage accessible to said apparatus, wherein ~~the apparatus is triggerable, on activation of said generation means to~~ when the meta-data generator generates a set of meta-information on activation by said first user, said comparator is automatically activated to compare said at least one set of meta-information with at least one user profile associated with a second user and, in dependence upon the result of said comparison, to automatically address an alert message to said first user comprising at least the identity of said second user.

3. (currently amended) An apparatus according to Claim ~~1~~2, wherein said ~~comparison means are~~ comparator is operable to compare a user profile associated with said first user with at least one further user profile and thereby to identify a user having a similar user profile to that of said first user.

4. (currently amended) An apparatus according to Claim ~~1~~2, including ~~selecting means~~ a processor arranged to enable said first user to select one or more of said identified users and to generate an alert message for sending to said one or more selected users.

5. (currently amended) An apparatus according to Claim ~~1~~2, wherein, in use, said stored sets of information conform to a first predetermined format and wherein said apparatus includes ~~conversion means~~ a converter to enable a set of information received at the input in a format other than said first predetermined format to be converted into said first predetermined format and stored in said data storage.

6. (currently amended) An apparatus according to Claim ~~3~~2, including ~~monitoring means operable~~ a processor arranged to monitor the user profile and to detect a change to the user profile of said first user and to automatically cause said comparator ~~trigger said comparison means~~ to compare the changed user profile with other user profiles stored in said data storage and thereby to identify a user having a similar user profile to the changed profile of said first user.

7. (currently amended) An apparatus according to Claim ~~1~~2, including a processor arranged to monitor the user profile ~~monitoring means operable~~ to detect a change to the user profile of said first user and to ~~trigger~~ automatically cause said ~~comparison means~~ comparator to compare the changed user profile with meta-information stored in said data storage and thereby to alert said first user to a stored information set matching the changed profile.

8. (currently amended) An information access system comprising a plurality of software agents, each agent comprising elements providing:

an input for receiving a set of information selected by a first user;

data storage access for storing one or more user profiles, each said user profile comprising at least one predetermined keyword;

a meta-data generator, arranged to automatically generate at least one set of meta-information from the set of information received at the input, said meta-information including at least a pointer for the set of information, wherein at least one set of meta-information generated is stored in accessible data storage;

a comparator for comparing at least one of said one or more user profiles with said at least one set of meta-information and for identifying, in dependence upon the results of said comparison, a user having a profile similar to said at least one set of meta-information; and

a processor arranged to alert said first user to the identity of said user identified by said comparator, wherein, in said system a plurality of users each have at least one associated user profile stored in data storage accessible to said system, and said meta-data generator generates a set of meta-information on activation by said first user, said comparator is automatically activated to compare said at least one set of meta-information with at least one user profile associated with another user and, in dependence upon the result of said comparison, to automatically address an alert message to said first user comprising at least the

identity of said other user, ~~i) to v) inclusive of the apparatus according to claim 1 and~~ wherein each agent ~~being~~ is allocated to a different respective user of the system.

9. (currently amended) A method of monitoring stored information sets accessible ~~by means of~~ using a communications network, for the purpose of alerting a first user to the existence of a second user having a shared interest in an information set selected by said first user, the method comprising the steps of:

~~a)~~ storing a user profile for each user, which profile comprises at least one keyword and an identifier for the user;

~~b)~~ receiving a set of information selected by said first user;

~~c)~~ generating a set of meta-information dependent on said received information set;

~~d)~~ comparing the generated set of meta-information with a stored user profile other than that for said first user and, in dependence upon the result from the comparison, identifying a second user having a user profile similar to said meta-information; and

~~e)~~ transmitting an alert message addressed to the first user comprising at least the identity of said second user, wherein following said step of generating a set of meta-information dependent on said received information set, said step of

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comparing the generated set of meta-information and said step of transmitting an alert message occur automatically.

10. (new) The method as in claim 9 further comprising comparing a user profile associated with the first user with at least one further user profile to identify a user having a similar user profile to that of the first user.

11. (new) The method as in claim 9, wherein when the set of meta-information is generated, comparing said at least one set of meta-information with user profiles associated with each of the other plurality of users is automatically activated, and in dependence upon the result of the comparison, an alert message is automatically addressed to each of the plurality of users.

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12. (new) The method as in claim 9, further comprising enabling the first user to select one or more of said identified users and generate an alert message to send to one or more selected users.

13. (new) The method as in claim 9, further comprising receiving the set of information in a format other than a first predetermined and converting the information into a first predetermined format.

14. (new) The method as in claim 9, further comprising monitoring the user profile of the first user to detect a change to the user profile of the first user and automatically comparing the changed user profile with other stored user profiles to thereby identify a user having a similar user profile to the changed user profile of the first user.

15. (new) The method as in claim 9, further comprising monitoring the user profile of the first user to detect a change to the user profile of the first user and automatically comparing the changed user profile with meta-information to thereby alert the first user that the changed user profile matches a received set of information.

16. (new) The apparatus as in claim 2, wherein when said meta-data generator generates a set of meta-information on activation by said first user, said comparator is automatically activated to compare said at least one set of meta-information with user profiles associated with each of said plurality of users, and in dependence upon the result of said comparison, to automatically address an alert message to each of said plurality of users.